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**From:** Elizabeth Erwin [Erwin.ElizabethLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]  
**Sent:** 10/7/2011 1:13:24 PM  
**To:** Kadry, Abdel-Razak [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=acb325507bf7451b9735813cfde5e417-Kadry, Abdel-Razak]; Sasso, Alan [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=8cb867519abc4dcea88149d12ef3e8e9-Sasso, Alan]; Davis, Allen [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=a8ecee8c29c54092b969e9547ea72596-Davis, Allen]; Boone, Amanda [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=304ccd01957044a1bd50a366d1cd76d4-Boone, Amanda]; Persad, Amanda [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=fd13fdf1bd814755baac109c2ab990a0-Persad, Amanda]; AmandaM Evans [Evans.AmandaMLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Hotchkiss, Andrew [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=10f01ccc8611401bb34d16b71a87d3d5-Hotchkiss, Andrew]; Kraft, Andrew [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=4a94a4f199b247778abb02285a51b927-Kraft, Andrew]; Anne Grambsch [Grambsch.AnneLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Gatchett, Annette [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=f12d699a71f84e21bddbb876dae7f96c-Gatchett, Annette]; Jarabek, Annie [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=8b1de54d48e1429c8129f6499211dbdb-Jarabek, Annie]; Luke, April [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=b98bf69c14b142d3ac8e0e9132ee36ed-Luke, April]; CN=Audrey Hoffer/OU=DC/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA; Buckley, Barbara [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=4bb6dedc12624295b9e8e5f835a1f166-Buckley, Barbara]; Glenn, Barbara [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=7a2dc9210d2d4d02a623b33f87f49436-Glenn, Barbara]; Barbara Wright [Wright.BarbaraLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Clark, Becki [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=a906e07f1cd143b9a3c2ddb813b8140-Clark, Becki]; Hawkins, Belinda [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=075561d171e845828ec67a945663a8e6-Hawkins, Belinda]; Zwyer, Bette [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=79830e38edb14034b7e47e29ed213dab-Zwyer, Bette]; Bob Frederick [Frederick.BobLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Bob Sonawane [Sonawane.BobLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Brenda Carmichael [Carmichael.BrendaLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Gibbons, Catherine [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=2ac775a35a0945718edc7e02f50e6c12-Gibbons, Catherine]; Charles Ris [Ris.CharlesLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; CN=Chon Shoaf/OU=RTP/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA; Cubbison, Christopher [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=e1b702ba5f394a15a49c5efad199035a-Cubbison, Christopher]; Christina Bonanni [Bonanni.ChristinaLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Parsons, Christy [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=bf0dabe0c058478294128cb3f842573d-Powers, Christina]; Cai, Christine [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=8e5901665d14498983704fd9eeda0dd8-Cai, Christine]; Christine Ross [Ross.ChristineLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Christopher Sheth [Sheth.ChristopherLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; CN=Connie Kang/OU=DC/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA; Petersen, Dan [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=05e14a620a164436adfae701533b4cd5-Petersen, Dan]; Moore, Danielle [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=979ea3cb9c2f4da4ac701d93cb24c17d-Moore, Danielle]; Winner, Darrell [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=860556f5cd0f4855839907bcc90b2c41-Winner, Darrell]; Bussard, David [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=cf26b876393e44f38bdd06db02dbbfe5-Bussard, David]; Segal, Deborah [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=bcdd984267644f3fb89ea65f65e6f422-Segal, Deborah]; Debra Walsh [Walsh.DebraLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Hutchins, Debra [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative

Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=38b89ba9317a475ca671ae9fe840e00d-Jones, DebraL]; Shaw, Denise [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=556182b3879649039b11d36e5e09d9aa-Shaw, Denise]; CN=Doug Johns/OU=RTP/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA; Corona, Elizabeth [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=18d86fb8269b4557b5d06622b3a941af-Corona, Elizabeth]; Elizabeth Erwin [Erwin.ElizabethLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Eva McLanahan [McLanahan.EvaLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Lehmann, Geniece [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=949a2f9c9f9f484581c3d00b118193e6-Lehmann, Geniece]; Perovich, Gina [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=6e3c19d7f4db41bfa2477aa27ad83945-Perovich, Gina]; Suter, Glenn [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=86ff3a58b76b40e4a75d9441bd584153-Suter, Glenn]; Harlal Choudhury [choudhury.harlalLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; CN=Helen Knecht/OU=CI/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA; Hui-Min Yang [Yang.Hui-MinLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Ila Cote [Cote.IlaLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Avery, James [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=b0fc9e70467647709fa9377dfb987f10-Avery, James]; James Ball [Ball.JamesLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Strong, Jamie [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=ea753aafefb74c268550fe6a2c187838-Benedict, Jamie]; Gamble, Janet [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=9f345a4a1e5e45fddb51817c8d129f95-Gamble, Janet]; Frithsen, Jeff [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=e3743bd6f3c345baae407c1d6f78e92-FRITHSEN, JEFF]; Jennifer Jinot [Jinot.JenniferLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; CN=JMichael Davis/OU=RTP/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA; Vandenberg, John [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=dcae2b98a04540fb8d099f9d4dead690-Vandenberg, John]; Kaiser, Jonathan [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=d8d90ca09c2744f080d333034ee08fe7-Kaiser, Jonathan]; CN=Jordan Trecki/OU=DC/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA; Karen Hammerstrom [Hammerstrom.KarenLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Hogan, Karen [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=eb7dc31713d443f0a322f0163d8d7c73-Hogan, Karen]; Kate Guyton [Guyton.KateLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Deener, Kathleen [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=b9a2ff1c086249ea8f6414afde8a5e54-Deener, Kathleen]; Newhouse, Kathleen [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=5f019c8179304045acd61bc05b571fb0-Newhouse, Kathleen]; Raffaele, Kathleen [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=cc48281bbab34bf5bf3ab1a63780d5ca-Kathleen Raffaele]; Kelly Serfling [Serfling.KellyLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Krista Christensen [Christensen.KristaLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Alexander, Laurie [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=1b0c420c5c71464b922e50788a1c22de-Alexander, Laurie]; Kopylev, Leonid [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=abfe6798809e4c8c8a27452ec86726d8-Kopylev, Leonid]; Lisa Vinikoor-Imler [Vinikoor-Imler.LisaLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Lucy Curtis [Curtis.LucyLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Flowers, Lynn [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=1a4411c874d041b9a8badfc32b91bd70-Flowers, Lynn]; CN=Madalene Stevens/OU=DC/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA; Field, Malcolm [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=8d12938447d14c7babcf431d75d745f6-Field, Malcolm]; Pratt, Margaret [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=8eda90b62a874c7ea9d857903ac1fd14-Pratt, Margaret]; Maria Spassova [Spassova.Maria@epa.gov]; Marian Rutigliano [Rutigliano.MarianLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Martin Gehlhaus [Gehlhaus.MartinLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Ross, Mary [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=98359cd1f66f46ec91d327e99a3c6909-Ross, Mary]; Gwinn, Maureen [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=4bdc5237a5c440a7b664518e23eb5647-Gwinn, Maureen]; Michael Slimak [Slimak.MichaelLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Troyer, Michael [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=847b0020dd0e457e85f99a1ad64b26d-Troyer, Michael]; Wright, Michael [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=0087b3fe163145869deead8b626fbfa3-Wright, Michael]; Keshava, Nagalakshmi [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group

(FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=d125c2980ab348ec828ba8f513b95049-Keshava, Nagalakshmi]; Birchfield, Norman [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group  
 (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=c910f2fd28414e819b6afe6dda525e9f-Birchfield, Norman]; CN=Patricia Gillespie/OU=RTP/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA; Murphy, Patricia [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group  
 (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=4e02a7540f8042fda07eed1248addaf7-Murphy, Patricia]; Schlosser, Paul [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group  
 (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=121cf759d94e4f08afde0ceb646e711b-Schlosser, Paul]; White, Paul [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group  
 (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=4e179825823c44ebbb07a9704e1e5d16-White, Paul]; Peter Preuss [Preuss.PeterLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Sams, Reeder [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group  
 (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=7d5b479ccd894cea99ae55df20de6971-Sams, Reeder]; Jones, Samantha [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group  
 (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=eac77fe3b20c4667b8c534c90c15a830-Jones, Samantha]; Barone, Stan [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group  
 (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=a4f8618acbb418da24c110f3123a2af-Barone, Stan]; Stella Spyropoulos [Spyropoulos.StellaLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Vulimiri, Suryanarayana [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=1a4f972302434ec6a04b015b14845a9d-Vulimiri, Suryanarayana]; Makris, Susan [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group  
 (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=7654051d8d1240a39dfa9463c9b0b7e5-Makris, Susan]; Rieth, Susan [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group  
 (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=00aac63cc995489188b8a449aaa18f5e-Rieth, Susan]; CN=Suzanne Martos/OU=DC/O=USEPA/C=US@EPA; Berner, Ted [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group  
 (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=f1949c9653024d3cb4aa4c2bd69c4fde-Berner, Ted]; Teneille Walker [Walker.TeneilleLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]; Bateson, Thomas [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=29bfdde020bf4e93b431b9a72d9d230f-Bateson, Thomas]; Blessinger, Todd [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group  
 (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=f5240ca690c84f8fb20bac6fd7273fd5-Blessinger, Todd]; Long, Tom [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group  
 (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=7526c52b77aa4516b9ac197536e5a6a0-Long, Tom]; Cogliano, Vincent [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group  
 (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=51f2736376ac4d32bad2fe7cfef2886b-Cogliano, Vincent]; Weihsueh Chiu [Chiu.WeihsuehLNDU@usepa.onmicrosoft.com]

**Subject:** NEWS UPDATES: EPA, GAO Officials Dismiss Suggestion That Agency Suspend IRIS Assessments (BNA)

## EPA, GAO Officials Dismiss Suggestion That Agency Suspend IRIS Assessments

By Pat Rizzuto

Top officials from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Government Accountability Office dismissed suggestions from some members of Congress that the agency suspend its Integrated Risk Information System assessments in testimony before a House subcommittee Oct. 6.

David Trimble, director of the Natural Resources and Environment division of the Government Accountability Office, said, "Everything comes to a screeching halt. ... Everyone is left hanging" if IRIS assessments cease. Regulatory officials would be left without critical information they need to inform their decisions, he said.

Paul Anastas, assistant EPA administrator for research and development, told the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy that such a move could lead to increased public health risks.

Anastas's comment was in response to a question by Rep. Diana DeGette (D-Colo.) on calls by some members of Congress to suspend IRIS assessments (187 DEN A-13, 9/27/11).

IRIS assessments evaluate the human health hazards of chemicals and the doses at which such problems could occur. Risk assessors combine that information with exposure information to calculate the risks posed by specific situations, such as air pollutant emissions, and whether those risks need to be regulated or otherwise managed.

## GAO Report Coming

By the end of the year, Trimble said, GAO will issue a review of EPA's IRIS program to evaluate changes it announced in 2009 and additional improvements Anastas described in July to implement recommendations in a report issued by the National Academies (134 DEN A-7, 7/13/11).

David Dorman, a toxicology professor at North Carolina State University, and Thomas Burke, an associate dean at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, said EPA's IRIS program would benefit by adopting the improvements the National Academies suggested. Dorman served on the academies' committee that made the recommendations.

Those suggestions included providing the criteria for evaluating individual studies, for assessing the weight of evidence, and for selecting certain studies that supply key numerical values for subsequent regulations. The academies report also urged efforts to reduce redundancies and inconsistencies in the typically lengthy documents.

Anastas's prepared testimony for the hearing, largely addressed improvements EPA has made to the program based on the critique by the National Academies.

### Criticisms Address Risk Management, Not Science

Burke said that even if EPA assessments follow the recommendations, the analyses are likely to remain controversial.

"Many of the public criticisms [of IRIS assessments] address the implications for the costs of risk management rather than the scientific content of the IRIS assessments," Burke said.

"If two studies give conflicting results for an adverse health effect, which do you choose?" Burke asked. "Hazard assessments will never tell you what risk is acceptable. That's a policy question."

Burke referred to the years he worked in New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection and as deputy commissioner of health.

"In my experience as a state official in New Jersey, a clean environment is definitely good for business. Just ask the resort owners at the Jersey shore, or the businesses along the redeveloped Hudson River shoreline," Burke said.

### 'Bureaucratic Expediency.'

Jerry Cook, technical director for Chemical Products Corp. in Georgia, said sometimes the problems with IRIS result from EPA staff being "more interested in bureaucratic expediency than in sound science." Chemical Products is now the only U.S. producer of barium chemicals, he said.

In the mid-1970s, when there were few animal toxicology studies of barium, EPA set a drinking water standard and a Resource Conservation and Recovery Act hazardous waste limit for the chemical, he said. The agency later assessed barium as part of its IRIS program, even though toxicity data on the chemical still were limited, he said.

Since that time, a toxicology study from the National Toxicology Program found barium posed less of a human health hazard than EPA had presumed, he said. That information should have been incorporated into the IRIS barium file, but it was not, Cook said.

Finally, after 11 years and as a result of information quality guidelines the Office of Management and Budget issued in 2002 EPA's assessment of barium was revised, Cook said.

"Unfortunately, EPA has not adjusted the RCRA regulatory level," Cook said.

Testimony and statements from the chemical risk hearing are available at <http://energycommerce.house.gov/hearings/hearingdetail.aspx?NewsID=896>

Elizabeth Erwin  
Communications Assistant  
National Center for Environmental Assessment  
Office of Research and Development  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Office: (703) 347-0205  
Blackberry: Personal Matters / Ex. 6

Fax: (703) 347-8699